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## **Presiding Bishop's statement on President Bush's 2006 federal budget**



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The Presiding Bishop today offered the following commentary on President Bush's FY'06 budget request:

In the life of our nation, one of the most concrete expressions of our shared moral values and priorities is the federal budget. In examining whether a budget properly reflects America's values, the Church is called to ask the following questions:

- Is the budget compassionate? Jesus tells his followers to "be compassionate, as your Heavenly Father is compassionate." But compassion is just an abstraction unless we make it real in our lives. A compassionate nation must use its common resources not just for matters like security and national defense, but also to respond to the Gospel command to care for the least among us.
- Does the budget strive to serve the human family, both at home and around the world? Our nation is part of a community that stretches beyond our borders. This gives us an imperative to use our common resources to combat poverty, disease, injustice, and instability wherever they occur, but most of all in places where the need is greatest.
- Does the budget serve the common good? Jesus tells us that "from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required." While we hear a great deal in the secular world about creating an "ownership society," the ethic of Christian stewardship teaches us that the resources we possess are God's alone, merely held in trust by human hands. In a nation of such immense prosperity, our budget must seek to use our resources not just for our own good, but broadly for the good of the entire human family.

While there are some areas in President Bush's budget that give me hope, I am deeply disheartened by others. As Congress begins its budget deliberations and the Administration negotiates with them, there are a number of areas I hope they will consider anew. In particular, I am concerned that this budget neglects and exacerbates our nation's healthcare crisis, especially for children and seniors, and fails to honor the commitments our nation has made to combating poverty and disease overseas. Such a budget is not a reflection of the compassionate values of our nation, nor of the Gospel's command to care for the least among us.

HEALTHCARE

Forty-five million Americans today lack access to quality and affordable health care, an increase of five million over the past three years. This budget exacerbates the problem by recommending deep cuts in Medicaid, of which the most bruising impact of these cuts will fall upon the neediest in our midst: the poor, children, senior citizens, and the disabled and states will be hard-pressed to make up the difference. If our federal budget is to reflect the values of the American people, it must better care for the neediest among us.

## POVERTY AND DISEASE ABROAD

Two years ago, I warmly applauded the President's call for \$15 billion to combat HIV/AIDS overseas and his creation of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) to combat poverty and instability around the world. These are areas of deep concern for me, especially as I consider the plight of our 27 million Anglican brothers and sisters who live in sub-Saharan Africa. While I am gratified to see that both program areas received small increases over last year's funding levels, I am concerned that they continue to fall short of the commitments the President has made. In particular, I am troubled that the budget, for the second time in two years, significantly cuts the U.S. contribution to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and funds the MCA at just 60 percent of its promised level. These figures are particularly problematic when viewed alongside the budget's other cuts in foreign-aid programs. As the President has observed in the past, our nation's efforts to combat poverty and disease abroad are not just a matter of humanitarian obligation, but a necessity in building a more secure and stable world.

## AID FOR THE PALESTINIANS

One area of the budget that gives me hope is the provision of \$150 million in aid to the Palestinian people. It is my sincere prayer that this is a signal that the United States has re-committed itself to helping to lead a political process to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At this unique moment of opportunity, the vision of a two-state solution is coming back into focus, giving me hope that Palestinians and Israelis may both soon live in freedom and security.